

Epigrams, Art, and the “Macedonian Renaissance”

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Few topics in the history of Byzantine art have been more debated than the question of the “Macedonian Renaissance,” a term that has been applied to a series of classicizing works created during the tenth century in many media, including manuscript painting, ivory and bone carving, metalwork, and glassware.¹ The essential problem is whether these works of art represented a conscious revival of antiquity, or whether they were merely the last remnants of a devalued classical tradition, whose only purpose was to convey a superficial antique appearance, now drained of specific content. The purpose of the following pages is to examine the issue from a new perspective, by bringing into consideration a small number of poems from the Macedonian period that can be associated with classical or classicizing works of art, and that have not previously been exploited by art historians.

I. AN AQUATIC MUSICIAN DESCRIBED BY JOHN GEOMETRES

The epigrams of John Geometres, a poet and rhetorician active in the second half of the tenth century, are a still insufficiently utilized source for the art and architecture of Byzantium. One reason why art historians have failed to make use of these poems is their undoubted obscurity, which renders their interpretation both difficult and challenging. Of no poem is this more true than the puzzle that will be discussed in the following pages,

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¹Among recent discussions of classicism in tenth-century Byzantine art, see, especially, K. Weitzmann, “The Classical Mode in the Period of the Macedonian Emperors: Continuity or Revival?” in *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina*, I: *The ‘Past’ in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, ed. S. Vryonis, Jr. (Malibu, 1978), 71–85; H. Belting, “Problemi vecchi e nuovi sull’ arte della cosiddetta ‘Rinascenza Macedone’ a Bisanzio,” *Corsi di cultura sull’ arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 29 (1982), 31–57; idem, “Kunst oder Objekt-Stil? Fragen zur Funktion der ‘Kunst’ in der ‘Makedonischen Renaissance,’” in *Byzanz und der Westen*, SBWien 432, ed. I. Hutter (Vienna, 1984), 65–83; I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, “The Cup of San Marco and the ‘Classical’ in Byzantium,” in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800–1250: Festschrift für Florentine Mütterich zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Bierbrauer, P. K. Klein, and W. Sauerländer (Munich, 1985), 167–74. The most important formulation of the “Macedonian Renaissance” is by K. Weitzmann, *Geistige Grundlagen und Wesen der Makedonischen Renaissance*, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 107 (Cologne-Opladen, 1963); Eng. trans. in idem, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination* (Chicago, 1971), 176–223. See also, now, I. Ševčenko, “Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 167–95, esp. 183–84.

a thirty-one line *ekphrasis* written in dodecasyllable verses, whose language is particularly allusive and ambiguous.² In attempting to provide a solution to the riddle posed by the poem’s subject, my strategy will be to present several alternative hypotheses, concluding with the one that appears to present the neatest fit. However, this paper does not pretend to provide a final solution to the question. My main purpose is to draw the attention of researchers to the epigram, which, whatever its meaning, is certainly a striking example of tenth-century classicism. The text, taken from the edition by Cramer, and a translation follow:

Εἷς τινα μουσικόν.

- Ὀρφεύς τις ἢ Θάμυρις ἢ καὶ Κινύρας
 ἔθελγον ὥδαῖς δένδρα, θήρας καὶ λίθους·
 τῶν σῶν δὲ τερπνῶν ἐμμελῶν λιγυσμάτων
 ἄθελκτον οὐδὲν, ἀλλὰ καὶ θαλασσίους
 5 πέτρας, δοκῶ μοι, καὶ θάλασσαν ἀγρίαν
 αὐτὴν κατευνάζουσι καὶ πνοῶν βίας.
 ὀρᾶς γὰρ ὡς ἤκουσεν εὐθύς τοῦ μέλους.
 παύει μὲν αἰθήρ συστροφὰς ἀντιπνόους,
 ῥήσσει δὲ πυκνὰς τῶν νεφῶν ἀντιστάσεις.
 10 ὀρᾷ δὲ φαιδρὸν, προσγελᾷ τὴν αἰθρίαν·
 κάτω δὲ καὶ θάλασσα κυματουμένη,
 ἐξυπτιοῦται νῦν κατεστορεσμένη·
 τὴν ὕβριν ἐξέπτυσεν, ὡς φονεὺς ξίφος
 ἔρριπεν εἰς γῆν, πᾶν κατηύνασε θράσος·
 15 διῖσταται χαίρουσα πρὸς τὸ σὸν μέλος,
 γελᾷ γαλήνην· λεῖον ἤδὺ προσβλέπει.
 σκαίρουσιν ἰχθύς· προσλαλεῖ σοι τῷ μέλει
 φιλωδὸς ἀντίμολπον ἄλκυὸν μέλος·
 δελφὶς παραπλεῖ καὶ περιπλεῖ τὴν λύραν.
 20 σκάρος δὲ φωνεῖ, προτρέχει δὲ ναυτίλος·
 προσπλεῖ δὲ μικρὸν καὶ προπέμπει πομπίλος.
 ἀλλ’ ἐνδέδοικα μὴ χορεῦσαι πρὸς μέλος
 καὶ τὴν φέρουσαν πάντα θέλξας ὀλκάδα,
 ἄνω κάτω τὰ πάντα συστρέψης βία,
 25 ἢ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν θήρας ὄρνεις ἰχθύας
 πηδᾶν βιάσῃ καὶ κατασπάσῃ κάτω.
 ἢ καὶ τραπῶσι πρὸς λίθους οἱ ναυτίλοι·
 ἢ πάντα μάλλον, εἰ τὰ Σειρήνων θέλοις.
 ἄμφω γὰρ αὐτὸς καὶ λίθους κινουμένους
 30 ὡς ἐμπνόους δείκνυσι, καὶ τοὺς ἐμπνόους
 οὕς ἄν θελήσῃς, πρὸς λίθους πηγνυμένους.

On a Musician

Some Orpheus, or Thamyris, or even Cinyras charmed with his songs trees, wild beasts, and stones. Not a thing escapes the charm of your harmonious, sweet-toned songs, but, it seems to me, they lull to sleep even the rocks of the sea and the rough sea itself and the blasts of the winds. For you see how it straightway heeded the song. The sky ceases from its sudden storms of adverse winds, and breaks up the thick resistance of the clouds.

²Ed. J. A. Cramer, *Anecdota graeca e codd. manuscriptis bibliothecae regiae parisiensis* (Oxford, 1861; repr. Hildesheim, 1967), IV, 275–76 (= PG 106, cols. 911–912).

It looks bright, it smiles upon the clear air. Below, the billowing sea now is flattened and smoothed out. It has spat out its violence, as a murderer cast his sword on the ground, and it has lulled all audacity. <The Sea> joyfully makes way for your song, and smiles in its calm. It looks smooth and gentle. The fishes leap, the song-loving kingfisher (*alkyon*) responds to your singing with a different melody. The dolphin swims beside and around the *lyra*, the *skaros* sounds, and the *nautilus* runs forward. The *pompilos* swims up a little and escorts. But I fear lest, having charmed the all-laden ship also to dance to your tune, you may force everything to turn topsy turvy, or you may drive the beasts, birds, and fishes to leap onto it and draw it down. Or the sailors may be lured to the stones; or indeed, everything, if you wish <to emulate> the sirens. For this one both shows the stones to be set in motion, as if they were alive, and the live creatures, such as you wish, to be turned into stones.³

What, then, is the subject of this poem? The first hypothesis would be to take the title, Εἷς τινὰ μουσικόν, in its most straightforward meaning and propose that the verses describe, with an extravagant series of nautical metaphors, a musician contemporary with the poet. But there are some indications that the poem may be describing not a real person but a work of art, which showed a musician surrounded by a calm seascape. For example, there is the statement at the end of the poem, in lines 29–31: “For this one both shows (or: “For you both show”) the stones to be set in motion as if they were alive, and the live creatures, such as you wish, to be turned into stones.” This conceit can be related to the common *topos* of ancient and Byzantine *ekphraseis*, which declared that works of art were so skillfully executed that they seemed to be alive. A typical example is an eleventh-century epigram by Christopher of Mytilene, describing a sculptured horse in the hippodrome, which begins: “This bronze horse that you see is alive, truly alive, forthwith it will even be snorting. And raising this foremost hoof, it will strike you with its foot, if you approach near. . . .”⁴

A similar *topos* was used by John Geometres himself. In Paris. suppl. 352, the manuscript edited by Cramer, the poem on the musician is immediately followed by another describing an imperial park and palace, which is probably to be identified with the *Aretai*, outside the walls of Constantinople.⁵ In the latter poem, John Geometres refers to sculptures, surpassing those of Praxiteles and other ancient artists, which appear to be capable of speech and expression.⁶

There are further indications in the poem that we are dealing with a work of art, and not with a live musician. After describing how the songs lull the rocks and the sea to sleep, John Geometres declares: “For *you see* (ὁρᾷς) how it (i.e., the sea) straightway heeded the song” (line 7). The appeal to the sense of sight suggests that the seascape and the sea creatures were not simply an elaborate metaphor for the skills of an actual tenth-century

³Alternatively, one could read δεικνύεις or δείκνυς σὺ for δείκνυσι, and translate “For you both show the stones to be set in motion. . . .” I am grateful to Alexander Alexakis and to Ihor Ševčenko for this suggestion.

⁴Ἐμπνους ὁ χαλκοῦς ἵππος οὗτος, ὃν βλέπεις,
ἔμπνους ἀληθῶς καὶ φριμάζεται τάχα·
τὸν πρόσθιον δὲ τοῦτον ἐξαίρων πόδα
βαλεῖ σε καὶ λάξ, εἰ παρέλθης πλησίον. . . .

Ed. E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (Leipzig, 1903), 30, no. 50.

⁵Ed. Cramer, 276–78. On the identification with the *Aretai*, see H. Maguire, “A Description of the Aretai Palace and its Garden,” *Journal of Garden History* 10, 4 (1990), 209–13.

⁶Ed. Cramer, 277, lines 21–26.

musician, but rather the description of what the poet saw in a work of art. Even the poet's failure to identify the aquatic musician is reminiscent of *ekphrasis*: in the first line he suggests as parallels Orpheus, or the legendary Thracian poet Thamyris, who contested the Muses, or Cinyras, the mythical king of Cyprus, who was renowned as a musician and was said to be a son of Apollo, but the subject of his description remains anonymous. One can compare the sixth-century description by John of Gaza of a *tabula mundi* painted in a bath house; in this complex composition, which had many personifications, the orator was unsure about the identification of some of the figures that he saw.⁷

There are, then, some reasons to suppose that our poet may have been describing a work of art. This leads us to our second hypothesis. A search among surviving Middle Byzantine art objects turns up some ivory and bone caskets, which are carved with musicians in the company of sea creatures, including a dolphin, as mentioned in the poem (compare line 19: "The dolphin swims beside and around the *lyra*"). Even though it would be difficult to claim that John Geometres was describing one of these boxes, they do present an interesting parallel to his poem. For example, a box in the Museo Civico at Bologna is decorated on its front with two plaques depicting nude, or semi-nude, lyre-players, one seated on an acanthus leaf, and the other sitting with his instrument held on a pedestal beside him. On the back of the casket there is a carving of a naked boy riding on two dolphins.⁸ A casket in the Museo Nazionale in Florence has on its lid a carving of a half-draped bearded man playing a lyre, and on its front a similarly half-draped musician, but this time unbearded. Perhaps these figures were intended to represent Hercules and Apollo. Another plaque, on the lid, shows an Eros riding a dolphin.⁹ The most elaborate of the sea-scenes are to be found on a casket in the Walters Art Gallery, at Baltimore. This box shows on its front side, at the left, a standing nude man playing a lyre supported on pedestal beside him (Fig. 1). He also may have been intended as a portrayal of Apollo. On the reverse side, we find a boy riding a hippocamp followed by a boy on a pair of dolphins (Fig. 2). Finally, on the lid there is another boy riding a hippocamp; he reclines along the back of the animal, holding a rudder (Fig. 2).¹⁰ However, there is much that is mentioned in the poem that does not appear in the carvings of the Byzantine boxes: the birds (lines 18 and 25), the different varieties of fishes (lines 17–21), the ship and the sailors (lines 23 and 27).

The aquatic imagery of the verses might suggest a third hypothesis that should be tested: since we have descriptions of Byzantine fountains decorated with statuary, we might ask whether the poem was describing a contemporary, tenth-century Byzantine fountain group. For example, according to Theophanes Continuatus, in the ninth century Basil I set up in the forecourt of the *Nea* a marble fountain decorated with bronze cocks, goats, and rams on its upper rim, all discharging jets of water.¹¹ In John Geometres' own description of the palace and garden of the *Aretai* he speaks of fountains and pools and lifelike sculptures, as we have seen above; his language here is reminiscent of

⁷P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Leipzig, 1912), 214.

⁸A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*, I (Berlin, 1930), 36, no. 31, pl. 17, b and c.

⁹Ibid., 37–38, no. 33, pl. 20, b and c.

¹⁰Ibid., 38–39, no. 40, pl. 22, b and c.

¹¹*Vita Basilii*, 85–86, *Theophanes Continuatus*, Bonn ed. (1838), 327–28.



1 Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, box with carvings in ivory and bone (photo: Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore)



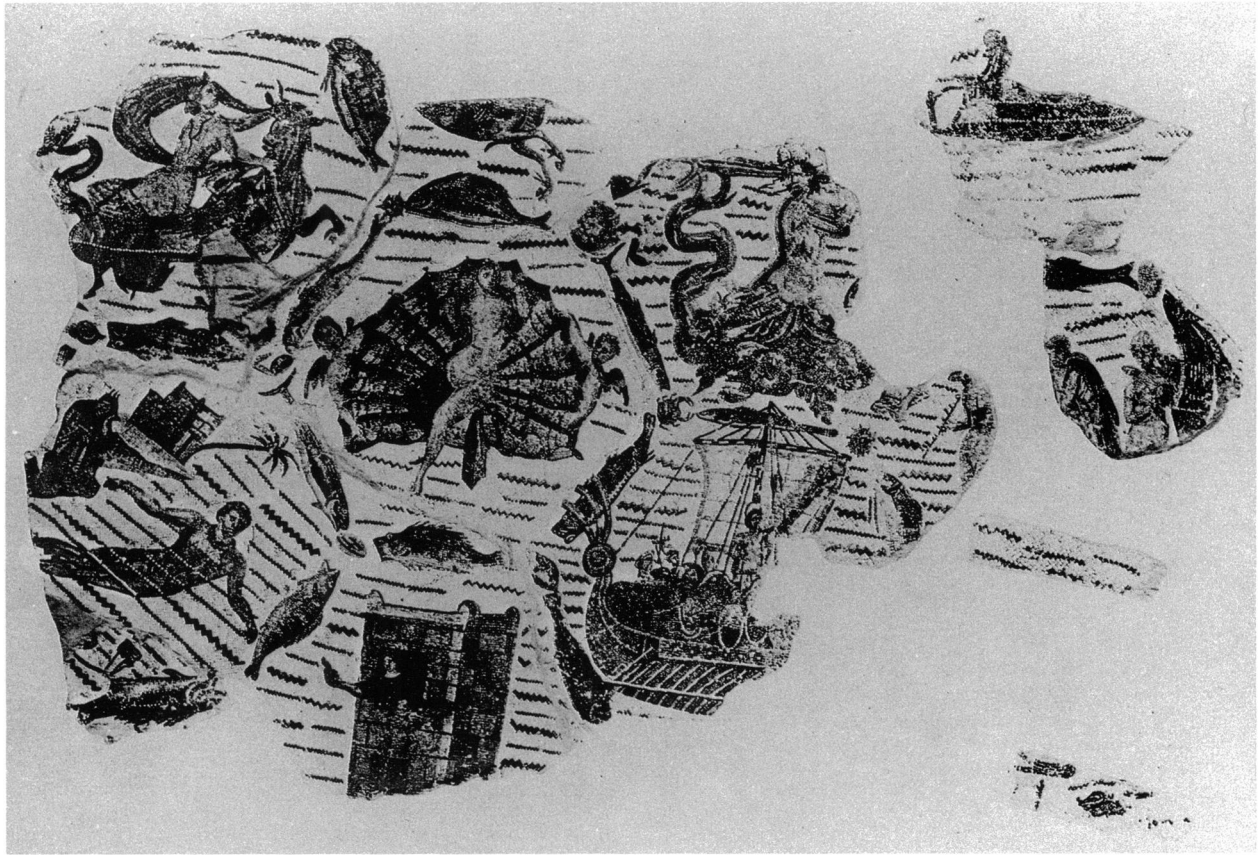
2 Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, box with carvings in ivory and bone. Boys riding hippocamps and dolphins (photo: Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore)



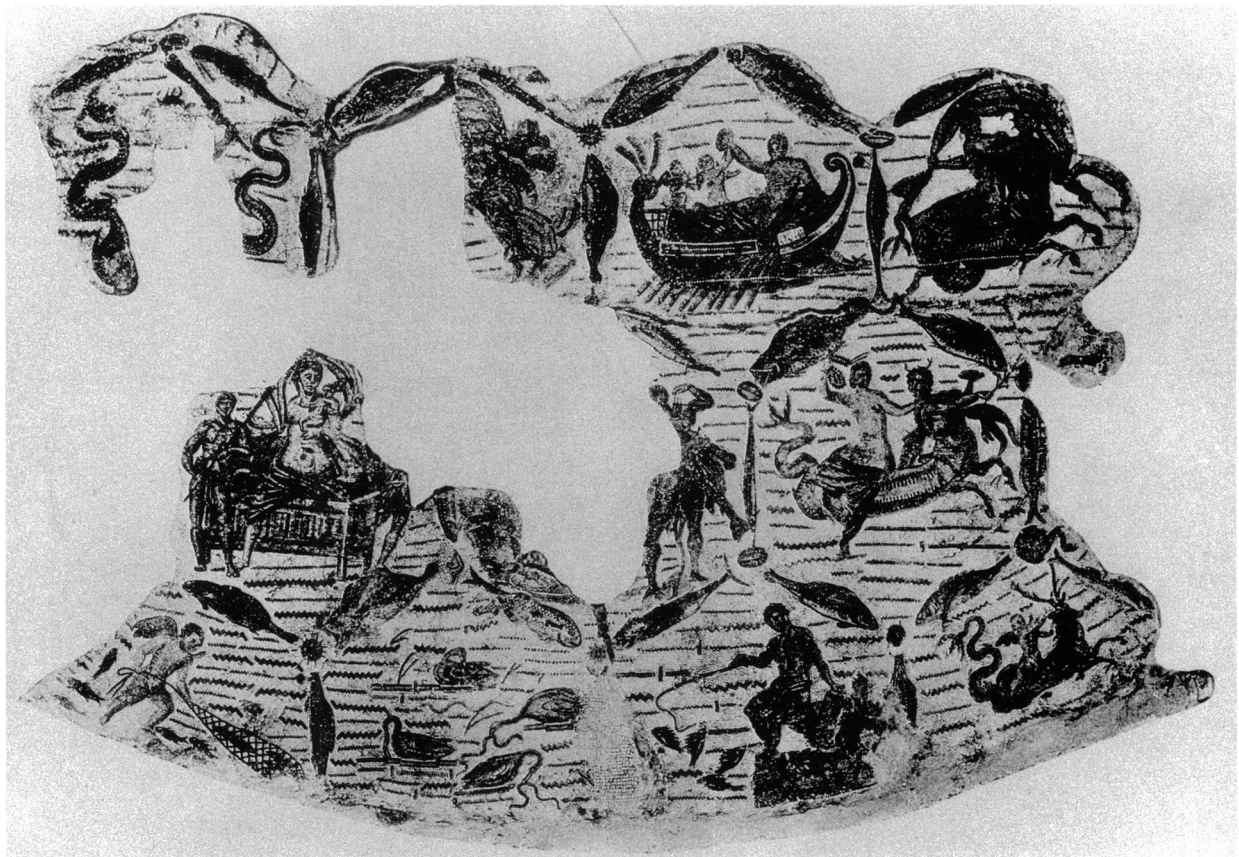
3 Bronze coin of Severus Alexander, from Methymna, on Lesbos (photo: after *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II, 2, pl. 434)



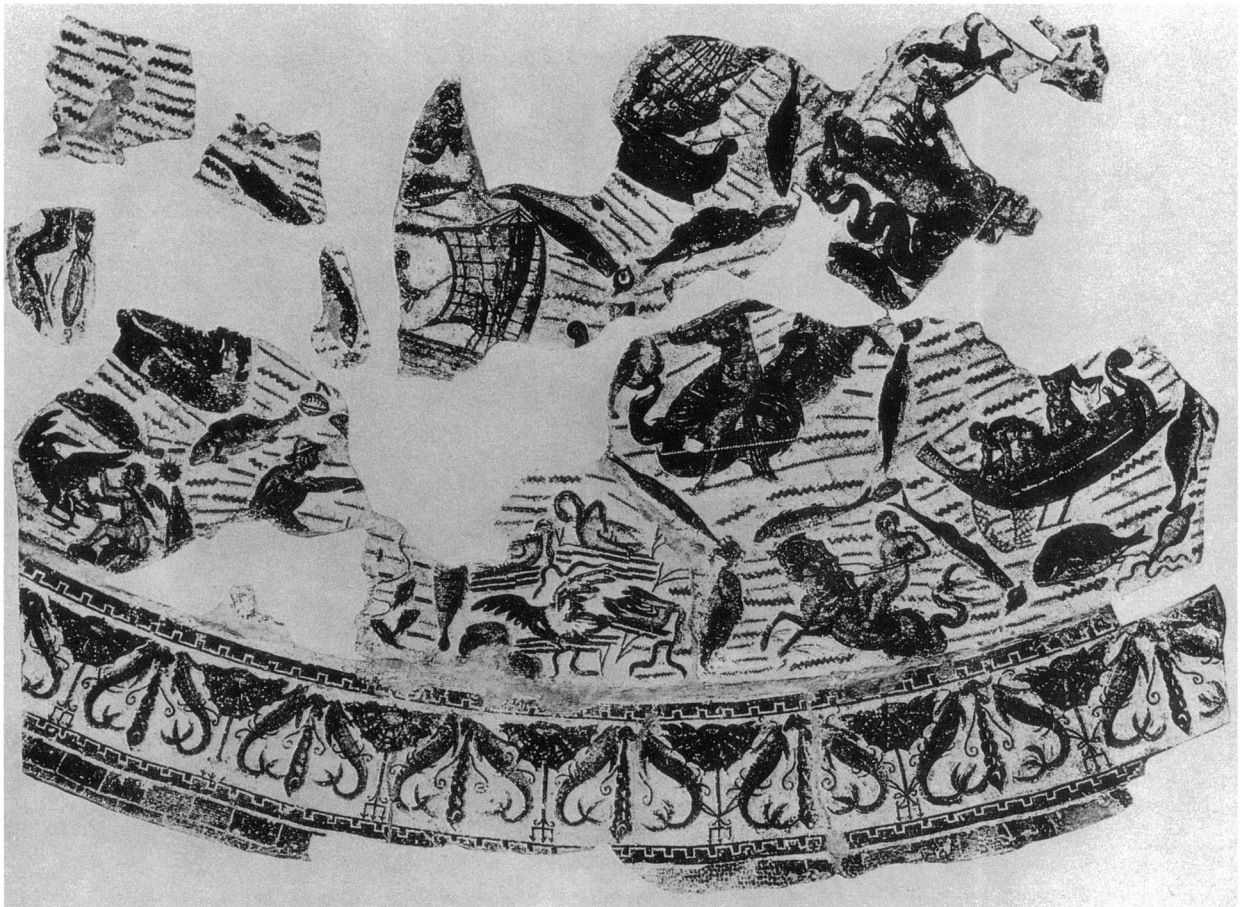
4 Thina, Great Baths, frigidarium, floor mosaic, detail. Arion (photo: after *Inventaire des mosaïques de la Gaule et de l'Afrique*, II, Tunisie [Paris, 1914], no. 18)



5 Thina, Great Baths, frigidarium, floor mosaic, detail. Aquatic motifs (photo: ibid.)



6 Thina, Great Baths, frigidarium, floor mosaic, detail. Aquatic motifs (photo: ibid.)



7 Thina, Great Baths, frigidarium, floor mosaic, detail. Aquatic motifs (photo: ibid.)



8 Piazza Armerina, villa, floor mosaic with a dolphin-rider
 (photo: G. V. Gentili, *La Villa Erculeia di Piazza Armerina, i mosaici figurati* [Milan, n.d.], fig. 9)



9 La Chebba, floor mosaic. Orpheus and dolphin-rider
 (photo: H. Stern, "La mosaïque d'Orphée de Blanzky-les-Fismes," *Gallia* 13 [1955], fig. 8)



10 Padua, Cathedral Treasury, silver-gilt inkpot, detail of lid. Medusa
(photo: P. Toesca, "Cimeli bizantini," *L'arte* 9 [1906], 37)



11 Padua, Cathedral Treasury, silver-gilt inkpot, detail. Ares
(photo: ibid.)



13 Padua, Cathedral Treasury, silver-gilt inkpot, detail. Apollo?
(photo: ibid.)



12 Padua, Cathedral Treasury, silver-gilt inkpot, detail. Eros
(photo: ibid.)



14 Padua, Cathedral Treasury, silver-gilt inkpot, detail.
Personification of a river? (photo: ibid.)



15 Paris, Musée du Louvre, tapestry-woven medallion. The Nile and Abundance
(photo: Cliché des Musées Nationaux, Paris)

his poem on the sea-borne musician: "Fountains, pools, and their myriad devices gush forth with pleasures beyond those of the streams. For these charm even the stones and beasts."¹² However, Geometres does not specify the subjects of the statuary in the garden. The most elaborate description of a garden fountain is to be found in the twelfth-century romance *Hysmine and Hysminias* by Eustathios Makrembolites. This fountain group included sculptures of a gilded eagle, a goat being milked by a goatherd, a hare washing its chin, and various birds.¹³ Yet, even in this fanciful account, the range of the statuary does not match the scope of the imagery described in our poem, where we find in addition to birds and various sea creatures a whole ship manned by sailors. It must be said that there is nothing in surviving Byzantine sculpture from the Middle Ages that would make a convincing parallel to our text.

This last observation leads to the fourth hypothesis, namely, that the poem might be describing a sculpture group of antique, or late antique date. There are parallels for the *ekphrasis* of antique sculpture by middle Byzantine authors. Constantine the Rhodian, for example, included in his tenth-century account of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople some verses describing the bronze doors of the senate house and their reliefs showing the battle of the gods against the giants, which, he said, had been taken from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus.¹⁴ In the first half of the eleventh century the poet Christopher of Mytilene devoted an epigram to a stone statue of Hercules, which he saw in the *Aretai* palace.¹⁵ And in the twelfth century, Constantine Manasses described a marble carving of Odysseus and Polyphemos.¹⁶ Could it be that our poem, likewise, is concerned with ancient sculpture? A suggestive parallel to the text is provided by sculpture groups of Arion, the marine counterpart of Orpheus. Herodotus mentions a bronze group at Tainaron, which showed the musician riding on a dolphin.¹⁷ A later statue-type, in a style that exhibits a freer movement than would be expected in the time of Herodotus, is illustrated on coins from Methymna on the island of Lesbos, the birthplace of Arion. The earliest of these coins dates to the fourth or third century B.C., the latest to the time of Severus Alexander, in the third century A.D. (Fig. 3).¹⁸ On them, Arion may be seen sitting on the dolphin; he is holding a lyre in his left hand, and, in accordance with the legend, he is clothed.

However, the closest parallels to our text are to be found not in ancient stone sculptures, but in mosaics composed of stone tesserae. With this medium, we reach the fifth and last hypothesis concerning the subject of the poem. A series of late antique floors present compositions that illustrate virtually all of the motifs described by Geometres.

¹²Κρήναι, λίμναι, τέχναι δὲ τούτων μυρία
τὰς ἡδονὰς βλύζουσι τῶν ρείθρων πλέον.
θέλγουσι ταῦτα καὶ λίθους καὶ θηρία.

Ed. Cramer, 277, lines 5–7. See also *ibid.*, lines 21–26.

¹³*Hysmine and Hysminias*, I, 5; ed. I. Hilberg (Vienna, 1876), pp. 4–6.

¹⁴Ed. E. Legrand, "Description des oeuvres d'art et de l'église des Saints Apôtres de Constantinople: Poème en vers iambiques par Constantin le Rhodien," *REG* 9 (1896), 40 lines 125–145. For a discussion of this passage, see C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963), 55–75, esp. 67.

¹⁵Ed. Kurz (as in note 3), 99, no. 143.

¹⁶Ed. L. Sternbach, "Beitrage zur Kunstgeschichte," *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts in Wien* 5 (1902), Beiblatt, cols. 83–85. See also Mango, "Antique Statuary," 68.

¹⁷Herodotus, I, 24.

¹⁸*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II, 1, pp. 602–603; II, 2, pl. 434, figs. 2–7.

For example, a late third-century mosaic from the frigidarium of the Great Baths at Thina, in Tunisia, displays at its center Arion playing his lyre while riding on a dolphin. He can be identified by the fact that he is dressed (Fig. 4; compare line 19). Around him there is an all-over design of hexagons formed of different varieties of fishes and shellfish (Figs. 5–7; compare lines 17–21). The hexagons frame other aquatic motifs, including small islands with trees (Fig. 5; compare line 2), fishermen seated on rocks (Fig. 6; for the rocks, compare lines 4–5), a smooth sea, indicated by rippling lines (Figs. 5–7; compare lines 5–6, 11–12 and 16), water birds (Figs. 6–7; compare lines 17–18 and 25), seabests, such as the hippocamp (Figs. 5 and 7; compare line 25), and boats with sailors (Figs. 5–7; compare lines 23 and 27).¹⁹ The villa at Piazza Armerina in Sicily houses another large mosaic composition centered on a naked lyre-player riding a dolphin (Fig. 8). Here a great variety of sea creatures surround the musician, including various fishes, shellfish, dolphins, water-birds, and sea-beasts, all populating a calm sea.²⁰

There were some late antique pavements that combined Orpheus with a dolphin-rider in the same composition, Orpheus being set in a landscape, flanked by land animals and trees, and the other musician in a seascape, surrounded by fishes and shellfish. Such a double design was displayed in a fourth-century mosaic at Blanzky-les-Fismes, near Laon in Northern France.²¹ Another juxtaposition of Orpheus and an aquatic rider was found at La Chebba, in Tunisia (Fig. 9). The left side of this early third-century mosaic shows a boy mounted on the back of a dolphin, while the right side depicts Orpheus playing his instrument; the one is surrounded by sea creatures and water-birds, the other by beasts of the land. In the center of the whole composition is an emblemata panel depicting a boat sailing past some rocks.²² The complex of motifs provided by these late antique mosaics certainly parallels the imagery evoked by John Geometres closely. In particular, it is only on these mosaics that we can match the ship described by the poet.

Such an interpretation of the subject matter of the poem suggests a number of double meanings in the text. It is possible that the author intended a series of fishy puns in lines 19 and 20, evoking the imagery of the scene: *lyra* = a fish and a lyre; *nautilus* = a mollusk and a sailor; *pompilos* = a fish which follows ships. The last lines of the poem, 29–31, also can be taken in two senses: "For this one both shows (or: "For you both show") the stones to be set in motion, as if they were alive, and the live creatures, such as you wish, to be turned into stones." That is, the musician both charmed the stones to life (in the picture), like Orpheus, and he showed the living creatures to be turned into stones (i.e., into the

¹⁹*Inventaire des mosaïques de la Gaule et de l'Afrique*, II, *Tunisie* (Paris, 1914), no. 18; K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1978), 133–34, 273, figs. 17–18, 93.

²⁰G. V. Gentili, *La Villa Erculia di Piazza Armerina, i mosaici figurati* (Milan, n.d.), fig. 9. On the identification of the central figure, who departs from the literary descriptions of Arion in being unclothed, see *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II, 1, p. 603. Possibly he is a conflation of Arion and Phalanthus, the mythical founder of Tarentum who was shipwrecked and carried to shore on a dolphin.

²¹H. Stern, "La mosaïque d'Orphée de Blanzky-les-Fismes," *Gallia* 13 (1955), 41–77, figs. 1–7; Dunbabin, *Mosaics*, 135.

²²Stern, "La mosaïque d'Orphée," 47, fig. 8; Dunbabin, *Mosaics*, 135, 254.

tesserae of the mosaic). Finally, there is a possibility that the title of the poem, Εἰς τινὰ μουσικόν, is itself a pun, for μουσικός could refer to a composition of precisely cut stones. Theophanes Continuatus speaks of a building in the palace which “is called *Mousikos* on account of the precise cutting of the marbles.”²³

A few additional observations may be made in connection with the fifth hypothesis. First, this would not be the only known instance of a middle Byzantine author describing a mosaic of late antique or early Byzantine date. There is a detailed *ekphrasis* by Constantine Manasses of a wall mosaic in the “imperial palace” that depicted the personification of earth surrounded by fruits, sea creatures, and birds.²⁴ To judge from parallels in surviving Byzantine works of art, especially in pavements, the mosaic described by the twelfth-century author must have dated to the pre-Iconoclastic period, perhaps to the fifth or sixth centuries.²⁵ It is also possible that there are descriptions of fifth-century wall or floor mosaics in a poem by Leo Choirosphaktes, which describes a bath restored by Leo the Wise.²⁶ Professor Mango has recently argued that some of the subjects described by Choirosphaktes (including river gods, scenes of fishing, springs represented as young girls, and various animals such as water birds) are much more characteristic of late antique decoration than of the Middle Ages.²⁷

Second, if the poem by John Geometres is based on a late antique mosaic that was visible in the tenth century, the same composition could have inspired the carvings of boys and erotes riding hippocamps and dolphins that are found on the tenth-century caskets (compare Figs. 1–2 with the mosaic from Thina, illustrated in Figs. 4–7). It is known that one of the carvings on another middle Byzantine casket reproduced the statue of Hercules by Lysippos that stood in the Hippodrome, and which was later described by Niketas Choniates—even though the copy on the box may have been indirect.²⁸

Finally, even if the poem is a description of a late antique work of art, it makes an ambivalent statement about the question of the “Macedonian Renaissance.” It may be noted from the first line that John Geometres’ knowledge of classical iconography was insufficient for him to identify the aquatic musician exactly, but only allowed him to suggest some names of terrestrial performers for comparison. This supports the contention that the appropriation of classical motifs by tenth-century Byzantine artists and

²³ Μουσικὸς οὗτος κατονομάζεται διὰ τὴν τῶν μαρμάρων ἀκριβῆ συγκοπήν. . . . Cf. Theophanes Continuatus, Bonn ed. p. 146, 7.

²⁴ O. Lampsidis, “Der vollständige Text der Ἐκφρασις γῆς des Konstantinos Manasses,” *JÖB* 41 (1991), 189–205.

²⁵ H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*, Monographs on the Fine Arts sponsored by The College Art Association of America, XLIII (University Park, Pa., 1987), 74–75.

²⁶ P. Magdalino, “The Bath of Leo the Wise and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’ Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology,” *DOP* 42 (1988), 97–118, with text on pp. 116–17.

²⁷ C. Mango, “The Palace of Marina, the Poet Palladas and the Bath of Leo VI,” in *Ευφρόσυνον, Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζιδάκη*, I (Athens, 1991), 321–30, especially 326–27.

²⁸ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 26–27, pl. 5, b; K. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton, 1951), 161; C. Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” *DOP* 17 (1963), 73; H. Maguire, “The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art,” *DOP* 31 (1977), 135–36. The text of Choniates is found in *Nicetae Choniatae historia*, ed. J. A. Van Dieten (Berlin, 1975), pp. 649, line 84–650, line 9.

writers was intended to evoke antiquity in a general way, but was not always precise or well informed.²⁹

II. AN INSCRIBED INKPOT AT PADUA

While the epigrams of John Geometres have hardly entered the art historians' debate over the Macedonian Renaissance, the object to be discussed in the following pages, a silver-gilt inkpot preserved in the treasury of the Cathedral of Padua, is relatively well known to scholars of Byzantine art. Nevertheless, a consideration of contemporary tenth-century Byzantine poetry permits a few new observations concerning its imagery and significance. The inkpot, generally dated to the late ninth or the tenth centuries, is decorated with classicizing figures executed in repoussé.³⁰ Beneath the rim of the pot and on its bottom there are two engraved inscriptions, each consisting of a twelve-syllable line; the inscriptions have been discussed recently by Wolfram Hörandner, and his transcriptions of the verses are given here.³¹

Under the rim: Βαφῆς δοχεῖον τῷ Λέοντι πᾶς πόρος.

On the base: Λέων τὸ τερπνὸν θαῦμα τῶν καλλιγράφων.

These may be translated: "The holder of ink (is) for Leon every means of livelihood," and "Leon, the delightful marvel among the calligraphers!" Evidently, then, the inkpot was created for an accomplished scribe.

As Hörandner has pointed out,³² this object brings to mind a story told by Niketas Choniates about Theodore Styppeiotēs, the favorite of Manuel I. This individual was given a golden inkwell set with precious stones, on the occasion of a ceremony in the church of the Blachernai. Unfortunately, however, the gift aroused the envy of John Kamateros, who falsely denounced Styppeiotēs to Manuel I for treason, whereupon the poor man was blinded.³³

The inkpot in Padua is decorated with several mythological figures. On the lid is a splendid head of Medusa, framed by wings and writhing serpents (Fig. 10). Around the circular body of the vessel are four more figures, each separated by a "column" composed of two intertwined serpents, their heads snapping at the top. Reading from left to right, we can see: a nude bearded man, seated and holding a short sword and shield (Fig. 11); a winged boy, who approaches the warrior and proffers a helmet in his outstretched hands—below the helmet appear a bow and an axe (Fig. 12); a beardless nude man, who stands holding with his left hand a lyre balanced on a column or pedestal, and with his right hand a plectrum (Fig. 13); a seated male figure, his lower body loosely draped,

²⁹For such an interpretation of the "Macedonian Renaissance" in the visual arts, see, especially, Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Cup of San Marco," 167–74; A. Cutler, "On Byzantine Boxes," *JWalt* 42–43 (1984–85), 32–60, especially 42.

³⁰P. Toesca, "Cimeli bizantini," *L'arte* 9 (1906), 35–44, with full illustration; A. Guillou, *La civilisation byzantine* (Paris, 1974), pl. vi; C. Mango, "Storia dell' arte," in *La civiltà Bizantina dal IX all' XI Secolo*, ed. A. Guillou (Bari, 1978), 282; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Cup of San Marco," 170–71; W. Hörandner, "Poetic Forms in the Tenth Century," in *Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and His Age* (Athens, 1989), 135–53, especially 150–51.

³¹Hörandner, "Poetic Forms," 151.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Ed. Van Dieten, pp. 112, line 63–113, line 74.

seated in a semirecumbent posture with his right hand held behind his head and with his left hand resting on an object that may be an inverted cornucopia (Fig. 14).

While two of these figures are difficult to name with certainty, three of them can be identified without question. The head of the winged Medusa, wreathed with snakes, cannot be mistaken (Fig. 10); her function here must have been to guard the ink, and possibly also to protect against slips of the pen, and even against the ill-effects of envy, such as befell the blinded Styppeiotēs. The seated warrior and the winged boy with the weapons (Figs. 11 and 12) must be identified as Eros bringing arms to Ares, a familiar theme in ancient art.³⁴ With less certainty, one could propose an identification of Apollo for the beardless man standing with his lyre supported on a pedestal (Fig. 13); more closely than the musicians on the boxes (cf. Fig. 1), he resembles a type of Apollo found in ancient art in several media.³⁵ The fourth figure on the body of the vessel might have been intended to represent a river god (Fig. 14). A comparison can be made, for example, with the river Nile as he is represented on a sixth- or seventh-century tapestry weave in the Louvre Museum;³⁶ in each case the figure is half nude, and sits with his right hand held up to his head and with his left hand on a cornucopia (Fig. 15).

It may be suggested here that these classicizing motifs were not merely decorative, but that they played their part in the panegyric of the owner of the inkpot. In the case of Ares and Eros, there is an approximately contemporary poem that provides striking confirmation of such a role for the figures. Paolo Odorico has recently published 102 verses composed by an anonymous writer to accompany two silver *kalamoi* (pens), which the author gave to Romanos II when the latter was twelve years of age.³⁷ This poem provides an interesting parallel to our inkpot, for much is made there of the association of writing with conquest, and of the lance with the pen.³⁸ To quote one passage, addressed to the young emperor:

Now sharpen, make ready your reeds, sharpen many thousands or tens of thousands. Prepare not weak reeds from tender blades, but make them all such as these are by nature, strong from a silvered earth for writing of the worth of a golden race and of golden fingers. Have the vessel of red ink ready for use. Every nation and city of the enemy has come to be inscribed by your fingers, bending its neck to your scepter, which may lord over the earth from pole to pole; and the all-noble stock of Leo will rule until the end of time.³⁹

³⁴ Erotes appear as bystanders carrying the weapons of Ares in Roman paintings and reliefs depicting Ares and Aphrodite; some Roman lamps and gems show Ares accompanied by a single Eros holding his weapons, as on the inkpot; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* II, part 1, 542; *ibid* II, part 2, pl. 406, fig. 328, pls. 412–14, figs. 376–86.

³⁵ See *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* II, part 1, 212–16; II, part 2, esp. pls. 203–5, figs. 228–29 (terra-cotta statuettes in the Louvre); 230 (glass-paste gem in the Metropolitan Museum, New York), and fig. 261a (votive relief at Plovdiv).

³⁶ P. du Bourguet, *Catalogue des étoffes coptes: Musée National du Louvre* (Paris, 1964), 132, nos. D36–37.

³⁷ P. Odorico, “Il calamo d’argento: Un carme inedito in onore di Romano II,” *JÖB* 37 (1987), 65–93. See, also, Hörandner, “Poetic Forms,” 151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁹ Ὄξυνε τοῖνον, εὐτρέπιζε καλάμους,
ὄξυνε πολλοὺς χιλίους ἢ μυρίους,
προευντρέπιζε μὴ σαθροὺς ἐκ τῆς χλ[ό]ης,
[ἀλλ’ εὐτρέπι]ζε πάντας ὡς οὗτοι φύσιν
ἐξ ἀργυρᾶς γῆς εὐσθενεῖς πρὸς τὸ γράφειν

In the light of such a text, the choice of Ares and Eros to decorate the inkpot does not necessarily appear to be haphazard, but possibly purposeful; together with the inscriptions, these pagan deities could have referred to the qualities of the object’s owner.

With the other two figures on the body of the vessel, we are on less sure ground, for their identification is uncertain. If the nude man with the lyre is indeed Apollo, then it could be suggested that what the ink is to the scribe, the lyre is to Apollo: a means of persuasion and accomplishment. If the reclining figure was intended to portray a river, such a personification would have fitted very well with the function of the object, for writers, from the Evangelists onwards, often were compared by the Byzantines to rivers or to springs. An example of such a comparison from the secular realm, close in date to our inkpot, is the poem by Leo Choirosphaktes describing the bath restored by Leo the Wise.⁴⁰ After referring to depictions of rivers personified as river gods “with fiercely turned faces” and of springs personified as girls, the poet Leo relates these images to the rhetoric of the emperor Leo the Wise: “Reject all babble of false words; Leo has now gathered all rhetorical eloquence.”⁴¹ Leo Choirosphaktes, therefore, sees the personified rivers and springs as images of the patron’s flow of words; a similar thought may lie behind the personification on the inkpot.

CONCLUSION: EPIGRAMS, ART, AND THE QUESTION OF THE MACEDONIAN RENAISSANCE

The works of art and poetry discussed above may suggest a reason why the “Macedonian Renaissance” has been so hard to define, for this Byzantine cultural phenomenon evidently had more than one face: sometimes it is possible to see a relatively sophisticated and knowing appropriation of antiquity, but at other times we see only a vague evocation of the classical past, which apparently seeks little more than to evoke a mood. The inkpot with its verses falls into the first category, for here at least some of the images on the vessel may have portrayed specific pagan deities as part of a subtle encomium, in which the writing and the images combined to extol the virtues of the scribe. The epigram on the aquatic musician by John Geometres, however, appears to fall into the second category, for while the poem names specific terrestrial musicians from ancient mythology (Orpheus, Thamyras, and Cinyras) as parallels to his aquatic subject, the Byzantine writer

χρυσού γένους τιμήν τε χρυσῶν δακτύλων.
 βαφῆς ἐρυθρᾶς σκεῦος εὐθέτως ἔχε·
 ἅπαν [γὰρ] ἔθνος καὶ πόλεις ἐναντίων
 φθάνουσιν ἄρτι σοῖς γραφῆναι δακτύλοις,
 τὸν αὐχένα κλίνοντα σῇ σκηπτουχίᾳ,
 ἃ κυριεύσοι γῆς ἀπ’ ἄκρων ὡς ἄκρων,
 καὶ γὰρ κρατήσῃ μέχρι τέρατος χρόνων
 γονὴ Λέοντος ἢ πανευγενεστάτη.

Ibid., 92, lines 78–90. The association of pen and lance can be found also in Niketas Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, ed. J. A. Van Dieten (Berlin, 1972), 31, lines 19–20: ἡμῖν μὲν τὴν ἐκ τῶν βαρβάρων ἐλευθερίαν ὡς ἐν καλᾷ ὕπεσσημῇ τῷ σὺ φοβερῷ δόρατι (with reference to Isaac II). I owe this reference to Alexander Kazhdan.

⁴⁰Magdalino, “The Bath of Leo the Wise,” 105–6.

⁴¹Ψευδαλέων ἐπέων ρίψατε λέσχην,
 τεχνικῶν νῦν λογίων δράξατο Λέων.

Ibid., 117, lines 67–68.

fails to mention any mythological musicians closely associated with the sea, such as Arion and Phalanthus. The reader has the impression that, just as tenth-century Byzantine artists sometimes made up their compositions from a limited stock of classical figure types,⁴² so also the poet was operating with a limited stock of names from classical mythology, which he pressed into service as best he could.

The epigrams quoted in this article have only provided a partial and preliminary glimpse of the frames within which Byzantine poets and their audiences viewed the art of antiquity. A more extensive study of the rich, but sometimes enigmatic, poetry of the Macedonian period, particularly those poems having connections with the visual arts, would undoubtedly provide a fuller and more nuanced assessment of the significance of classical visual culture for the elite of ninth- and tenth-century Byzantium.

Dumbarton Oaks

⁴²See Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Cup of San Marco," 171, with reference to ivory caskets.